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Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams was on a mission of peace

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Ireland's flag, known as the tricolor, is comprised of equal parts green, white and orange. Green represents the native Irish people, mostly Catholic and nationalist. Orange represents the British, who occupied Ireland in the 1600s, most of whom are Protestant and loyalist. White is the universal symbol of peace and hope, representing the shared aspirations of both communities.

Before its adoption as the national flag of Ireland, the tricolor was the flag of the political arm of the Irish Republican Army, Sinn Fein, which today is the largest nationalist political party in the North and is the fastest-growing party in the South. Core principles of Sinn Fein are self-reliance and the belief that only a united Ireland can secure the nation's liberty for all people, Catholic and Protestant.

Sinn Fein's president, Gerry Adams, has worked courageously over the past 30 years to move the IRA away from its campaign of physical force toward using political means to achieve Irish independence and unity.

Because of the historical subjugation of the nationalist community by the British through armed occupation, the nationalist community engaged in armed resistance, resulting in a vicious cycle of resistance and violence that endured for more than three decades.

In response, Adams devised an alternative strategy, one that sought to achieve independence and unity through peaceful, democratic means.

What has all this meant in the long struggle for Irish peace? Adams' considerable efforts resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreements, and only last year, Adams led the IRA to end its armed campaign, resulting in the decommissioning and destruction of its weaponry and armaments.

Adams was scheduled to visit Buffalo on St. Patrick's Day to address large crowds and to talk about the Irish peace process and the tremendous influence the United States has had on building a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

He was coming to town to say "thank you," and to encourage our nation and its people to remain vigilant in support of the peace process.

As we all know, Adams never made it to our city. He was detained at a Washington airport after lunching at the White House with President Bush a few hours earlier, because Adams' name appeared on a so-called terror watch list.

Although too late for our celebration, his name is now removed from that list, a condition that will allow Adams to travel more freely within the United States - as other Irish party leaders do - and to continue to spread his message of peace to Irish-Americans throughout our nation.

The shame is not so much that Adams missed his Buffalo visit; his vow to make a future visit is a sincere one.

The true shame is that an individual whose mission is to bring peace to his homeland should have been considered a threat to American security at all.